

“Love Completely”

Matthew 5:21-30

Pastor James York

February 23, 2020

Today we continue with Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*. It began with the beatitudes that both encourage us to do and be more, actively partnering with God to transform our lives and are ways God graciously heals us. Last week, we explored how to be salt and light. Love gives the world flavor. Joy illumines all. We become saltier and shine brighter when we fast, giving something up for a period of time, so we can use that time to serve others.

Today Jesus teaches that controlling our thoughts expands love.

Matthew 5:21-30 NLT “You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’ But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell. “So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. “When you are on the way to court with your adversary, settle your differences quickly. Otherwise, your accuser may hand you over to the judge, who will hand you over to an officer, and you will be thrown into prison. And if that happens, you surely won’t be free again until you have paid the last penny. “You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ But I say, anyone who even looks at a person with lust has already committed adultery with them in their heart. So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”

Hershel Hobbs wrote, “Instead of lowering the standard prescribed in the law, Jesus lifts it to the higher standard of the spirit. Thus, more is expected of one under grace than of one under the law. ... The law forbade the overt act; Jesus forbids the inner attitude which produces the act.”

One way to think about heaven is being in loving relationship with all people, animals, and the cosmos. Heaven is when you, everyone, and everything is whole, complete, and perfect. Hell is having broken relationships with people, animals, and the cosmos. Hell is when you are broken, fragmented, and longing. Your loving relationships are heaven on earth. Thoughts of fear, hate, and anger destroy relationships and fragment our being which is hell.

Izzeldin Abuelaish is a person revealing heaven in the midst of hell. Izzeldin tells his story in the book *I shall not Hate*. He grew up with nothing in deplorable conditions in the Gaza strip. Against all odds, numerous setbacks and constant adversity he got his education and became a doctor. He chose to stay in Gaza and practiced medicine there and in the surrounding area. He healed Palestinians, Jews, and all people. He refused to hate anyone and chose to love everyone. Despite being humiliated, his first home being razed by an Israeli tank and his second home destroyed by a missile, and his 3 daughters and niece killed by an Israeli missile Izzeldin is unshaken in his belief that Palestinians and Jews will love each other and coexist peacefully. Izzeldin was a key person in the end of the Gaza war. Israelis were establishing a relationship with his family through daily cell phone interviews. He was being interviewed when the missile struck his house. Israeli compassion for Izzeldin caused an immediate cease fire, Israeli medics rescued the survivors and people on both sides demanded an end to the war. Izzeldin was interviewed right after his daughters were killed and he said. “If I could know that my daughters were the last sacrifice on the road to peace between Palestinians and Israelis, that I could accept it.” Later he said. “When someone does something hateful, they are misled and hated because they do not understand.” Izzeldin has established a foundation named after his daughters that promotes relationships between Jewish and Palestinian girls including a school dedicated to the purpose of relationships, love and peace. Izzeldin is realistic. He knows it’s no rose garden we live in and he strongly believes that medicine can bridge the divide between people. When someone is sick the doctor’s skin color, culture or country of origin doesn’t matter as long as they have the cure. Medicine is a tool that helps people better understand the struggles of one another which leads to better communication, establishes relationships, and develops peace and love.

Izzeldin’s colleague said he is a person of great empathy and genuine compassion. Given all the atrocities and frustrations heaped upon him, his family, his friends, I find it extraordinary that he never hated or condemned anyone,

rather was optimistic. Instead of thinking about what should have been in the past, he is full of hope for the future addressing the challenges of today.

Izzeldin wrote the book *I shall not Hate* to promote freedom from disease, poverty, ignorance, oppression and hatred. As a Muslim with deep faith, he fully believes that what is from God is good and what is bad is human made and can be prevented or changed. Izzeldin vows to always forgive and to avoid rage and hate. Izzeldin wants his book to inspire people who have lost sight of hope to take positive action to regain that hope and to have the courage to endure that sometimes long and painful journey to peace. He hopes his story will open minds, open hearts, open eyes to human conditions in the Middle East and help everyone avoid making sweeping generalizations and judgements. He believes hatred and darkness can only be driven out with love and light. Instead of building walls, let us build bridges of peace. Izzeldin believes that the disease affecting our relationships—our envy—is ignorance of one another. Judging without knowing. We need open minds. We need to establish relationships. Izzeldin says at the borders of consciousness, there is a feeling that every stranger, anyone unknown to us, is an enemy who poses a threat to us. Ask a healthy Jew or Palestinian, that are strangers, to share a room the answer will likely be no. However, if they are both ill, getting medical attention at the same hospital it is acceptable to share a room. The illness becomes a common thread, suddenly they have a topic of conversation. The families visit and celebrate with each other whenever either person's health improves. The relationship grows, fear and hate dissolves, love emerges. As a physician searches for the proper treatment for their patients. Each of us needs to search for the cause of our failure in the human journey to peace and discover why we are not happy, satisfied and secure. The cause is inside us, not outside us. The cause is in our own hearts and minds. Hate is a chronic disease and each of us needs to heal ourselves of hate. Izzeldin says, "First, we must join together to fight our mutual enemy, which is ignorance of each other. We must smash and destroy the mental and physical barriers within each of us and between us. We must speak and move forward as one to achieve our brighter future; we are all living in one boat, and any harm to some people in this boat puts us all in danger of drowning. We must stop blaming each other and adopt the values of our, us and we." Each of us must act. Refuse to hate. Build relationships. Nurture love. Speak out for love, togetherness, harmony whenever anyone speaks of fear, hate or blames another. Support and encourage those who love. Vote out of office anyone who spreads division, fear or hate. Fear and hate are blindness that leads to irrational thinking and behavior. Hate is a chronic, severe and destructive sickness. Love will bring us all together.

Lust is using a person. Lust dehumanizes and degrades. Contempt denies the value of the image of God that is within everyone. Every thought of hate one thinks creates hell for them. How important is it to love? Jesus explains that love is more important than worship. If you have an opportunity to come to worship or reconcile a relationship, then reconcile the relationship. How important is it to love? Jesus uses hyperbole. Do anything and everything to remove hate from your life. If your eye causes you to hate, gouge out your eye. If your hand causes you to hate, chop it off. Jesus does not want us to literally gouge out our eye or chop off our hand. Do anything and everything to remove hate from our life. Do everything to build loving relationships with every person, every animal and the cosmos.

One's thoughts are critical. C. S. Lewis said, "It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind." Being a master of one's thoughts is hard. Controlling one's thought is an every moment discipline. Let go of hateful, fearful negative thoughts. The moment a hateful thought emerges immediately replace it with a positive thought. If a hateful thought keeps emerging examine it for the source. Pray about that thought. Perhaps forgiveness is needed. Perhaps a relationship needs to be established or mended. Visualize handing that thought over to Jesus and Jesus handing you back a positive thought. Sometimes negative thoughts are dispersed by a walk, music, exercise. The Apostle Paul wrote, Philippians 4:8 NIV "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "There is only one way of worshiping God and that is to be reconciled with everyone."

Every thought you think brings either hell or heaven into your life. You can control your thoughts. God is eager to help you control your thoughts. Jesus is teaching you to bring heaven to earth, to love through your thoughts.

God's love is infinite. God loves each and every person. God loves all people. We grow in love by thinking loving thoughts. Amen